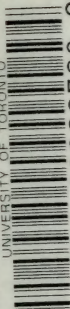
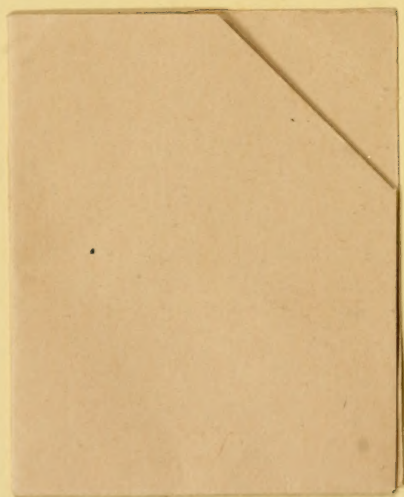


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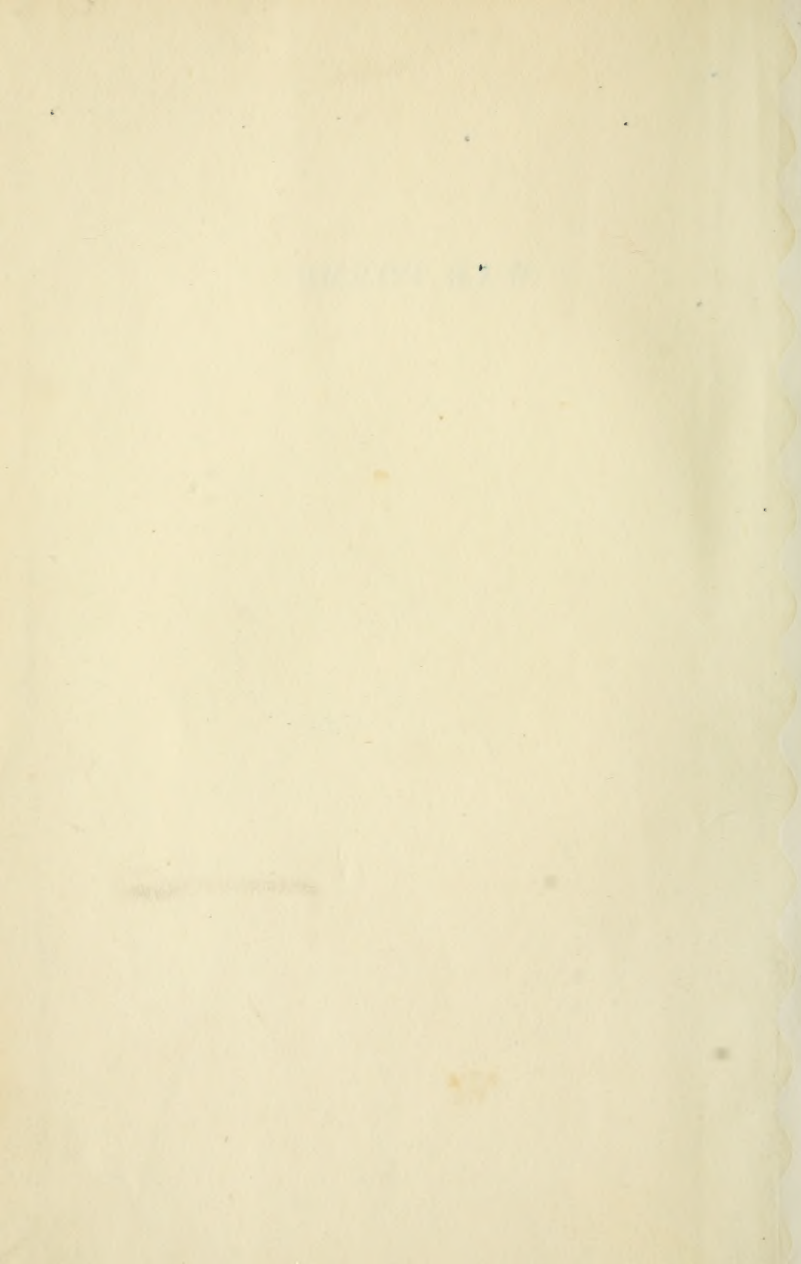
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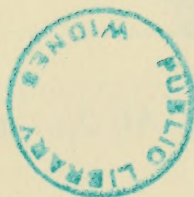


"Drax & Plunkett, 18th Baron

WAR POEMS

by

LORD DUNSANY



Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd.

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AN ANTIQUE FIGURE?

‘ And who was that ? ’ some child years hence will
say

In New York harbour. “That,” she will be told

“Was Liberty, a figure known of old,
Some kind of goddess of a bygone day,
Till Adolf Hitler came, who let it stay

To show the old beliefs men used to hold.

But do not stop. The air is growing cold.

It has no meaning now, so come away.”

For it may be that Liberty is dead,

Buried in Flanders or a Northern land,

No more to lead her children, as she led

Leonidas and Nelson by the hand;

While some who loved her, slowly congregate

Only as mourners, for all else too late.

And Germany shall cease to be

To the countries of the free

A perpetual threat of war,

Like a dark dream from afar

On a night without a star.

SPLENDOURS OF RUIN

Every minute, each second even, of time
 Could be condensed by poets' alchemy
 Into the substance we call poetry.
One drop of dew is ample for a rhyme,
If we could fathom it. But the sublime
 Splendour of daily things is hard to see,
 And missed, until the Muse of History
Strides in our own day into our own clime.
Then from the rubble of cathedrals, then
 With dust, once villages, the passing hour
 Gleams with the glory that is History's dower,
Then the lost dreams and broken hopes of men
Shine on our setting age, like sunset's glow
Brightened by Krakatoa years ago.

3

THE GATE OF HORN

A dreamy isle has sheltered me
But I can write from there
No song to welcome Victory
When her wings thrill the air,

When to our army or our fleet
She comes, or like a star
Above the thunder and the sleet,
Shines where our airmen are.

I cannot in that pleasant isle
Of marsh and mead and lake
And dreams of heroes dead long while
Write of a world awake.

And so to Kent I set my face,
Across whose narrow seas
The enemy has put in place
Rows of realities.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Eighty-five children drowned! A crime
Which Germany calls war.
I looked into the future time
And looked not very far,

To see a man walk all alone
Across Hell deep and dim,
While Herod from his flaming throne
Rose up to welcome him.

5

FAUNA OF KENT

One thing I know which Milton never knew:

When Satan fell, hurled headlong to the shade
Of Hell eternal out of Heaven's blue,

I know the screaming wail his pinions made.

THE REWARD

No paymaster the Home Guards know,
And our obscure careers
Will still remain unpaid although
The war drag on for years.

Yet this shall make us full amends
This our reward shall be:
We shall be free men when it ends
And shall see England free.

BETWEEN THE ARMIES

Now in the moonlight by three sacred streams,
Somme, Bresle and Aisne, there may be seen in
dreams

Two god-like shapes, Justice and Liberty,
Walking unseen by any German eye.

8

THE OLD VOICE

I heard a pigeon coo in Kent
And pause and then repeat its call.
The message drifted through the scent
Of marjoram and thyme and all

The blooms of the sun-gathering down,
And seemed to mark as transient things
The syrens wailing from a town
And drone of engines upon wings.

OVER THE TEA-CUPS

‘Did they come over you again to-day?’

One lady asked another near the sea.

‘Some came and some are down,’ I heard her say

‘And two are burning over by that tree,

But won’t you have another cup of tea?’

BEWARE!

Beware, beware, hyena; oh beware!

This wounded lion is not near to death.

Leap not upon him. Tarry in your lair.

Wait for the glazing eye, the failing breath.

Still what he was when he befriended you

Is he to day. Beware! Beware of him!

Lest he arise with the old strength you knew,

And tear you, poor hyena, limb from limb.

II

THE OLD BELLS

I cannot see the end; I cannot see
 When we will win or how. That being so
 Let us go on, without attempt to know
In what month or what year that end will be.

It may be that by you, or even me,
 The last shot will be fired before the glow
 Of bonfires hailing Hitler's overthrow,
When our dumb bells ring out for victory.

Think of that day, when tyranny seems strong
 And rations low and fortitude abating.
 Think of that day for which our bells are waiting,
Which rang of old when the storm drave along
King Philip's ships, and chimed for Waterloo,
And rang out Hindenburg. Soon Hitler too.

THE KNIGHT ERRANT

There was a time when in the west
The mountains with their golden gleams
Flashing from every rosy crest
Were only peopled by our dreams.

Lonely they were and though they shone,
A setting for all knightly pales,
No young adventurer climbed thereon,
No hero rode along their vales.

But now when evening's splendours burn
Where fairy rollers break and foam
On elfin mountains we discern
Some pilot past the peak ride home.

A TRUE STORY

From persecution in the South a Jew
Fled to Bohemia, till Bohemia grew
Dark with the very shadow for which he
Had left his Austrian home. Again he flew,
And came to Holland, that had housed the free
Times out of mind. And then the shadow drew
Its blackness across Europe, with the chill
That hangs about the death of Liberty.
He moved then into Flanders from the sea.
And the great engines followed, and the will
Of Hitler became Belgian law, but still
The persecuted man escaped, and came
To France, and still behind him moved the flame
Of villages, till Paris fell and till
The lights went out on Bordeaux's tragedy
And the poor actors walked away in shame.
And what land now? The silent land of sleep,
Where, in their thousands, Hitler hurries men;
No land that wanderer knew had peace so deep,
No other land he knew had strength to keep
Its frontier safe. He with his own hand then
Opened its gates, and was the citizen
At long last of a land where none shall weep.
And England fights that earth may be again,

Through miles of corn and miles where grasses wave,
Through wood and moorland, under sun and rain,
And stars, a world which no-one shall enslave,
And more to be desired than the grave.

IN HONOUR OF GENERAL DE GAULLE

Ere the rebellious hosts from Heaven fell,
Forth from their midst in scorn and all alone
There strode the faithful angel Abdiel.
And with what words they cursed him is not
known.

But we do know that a French court to-day
Sentenced de Gaulle, because at German feet
He left them wallowing and strode away
And would not share their shame and their
defeat,

But looked from heights of hope, far higher lands
Than Vichy knows, and saw beyond disasters
Afar, where Victory winged and waiting stands,
And still serves France and not her German
masters.

WAITING

Croydon, that fortress of the air
On English soil, the word was sent,
Must be destroyed. So up they went
Into the zenith blue and bare
And soon were roaring over Kent,
Above where anti-aircraft were.
And the Royal Air Force soon they found,
High in the cold clear firmament,
And dropped their bombs on English ground,
As they were told, and then turned round.
Meanwhile they wait in Germany
For those returning over sea
From Croydon and from victory.
And still they wait and strain their eyes
And no returning air-force see
And not a speck is in the skies.
'Why this delay? What can it be?'
A Nazi asks, till one more wise
And learned in the ways of war
Gives the opinion waited for:
'Perhaps they stay to colonize.'

THE PHANTOM

Spirit of France, whose shape no man has known,
Did Joan of Arc picture your face in dreams?
Or unto dying men, by cannon's gleams,
Triumphant upon battlefields though prone,
Your mighty figure at the last was shown,
Walking victorious by famous streams,
Or bending over them through starry beams.
And did Napoleon see you by his throne?
But what is that gray shape, as dim as rain,
Lost by the waters which through Vichy flow,
That stoops to drink as though in doubt and pain?
Is that immortal France? Wild fancy! No!
That is some phantom risen from his brain
When old age and disaster crazed Pétain.

HARVEST MOON 1940

The moon was full above the fields of Kent,
And woods were dim with darkness silvered o'er
Like a rare weaving from a distant shore
To cloak a fairy-queen, by wizards sent,
A light mist glittered where the roaming scent
Of downland flowers lured the moths that soar
On summer nights, and shut was every door
And empty the long road by which I went.
It was the harvest moon which so enchanted
Those fields that for things magical seemed
waiting
That made the olden elms and hedge-rows haunted
With mysteries the moon was intimating,
Look what a peaceful night it is, I said.
And that's as grim a joke as I have made.

PARIS

Who will sing a dirge for all
 Lost with Paris,
When the wind that bears the pall
For a city's funeral,
Woven of thick smoke, lets fall
 What he carries?

No, we will not mourn for stone,
 Spire or tower.
All the splendour she has known
Has from Paris risen and flown
 To her armies, where alone
 It will flower.

Out of valiant heart and brain
 Rose each storey
That has so long smiled in Seine.
Into valiant hearts again
They go home, for these retain
 France's glory.

THE REFUGEES

I dreamt I saw the shape of Liberty
 Lead blindfold Justice through a land of fears,
 And she herself was blinded by her tears.
And as they stumbled to the western sea
They spoke of days past, of democracy
 And other lost things of the happier years,
 As fleeing peasants mutter, where none hears,
Of crops and gardens that there used to be.
I saw them next near Calais on the shore,
 Huddled and shrunk and tired, and bent with
 woe.
 I thought to see them into exile go,
Never to look on France or Belgium more.
But, as I woke, they grew to fearful size
And stood like giant queens with angry eyes.

THE WANDERERS

Now over roofs of barns new filled with corn

Our guests, that lately through the evening
light

Darted and curved, are missing from our sight,
And all their little homes appear forlorn.

They were among us only yestermorn.

And now by hidden pathways of the night

They seek a land where morning is more bright
Than on the English eaves where they were born.

But who is this that stands with flickering wing,

With gaze averted, watching the last swallow,

And seeming momentarily about to follow,

Leaving the land she loved, soon wandering

For weary years until the fury cease?

Alas for us and all men! She is Peace.

TO A GERMAN AIRMAN

Not in the stone you smashed dwelt memory,
And not in stone are the Canadian dead
Immortal, but in hearts where they were bred
And in the country that they fought to free.
There they live on until no man shall be
Alive that knew them. Legend next shall shed
Its glory over them, but nought be said
Of your crass bomb and stupid victory.
Or, if you and your bomb are ever known
Hereafter, it will be as lifeless things
Fighting the dead and blindly breaking stone,
Going your ways with noisy blunderings,
Like rocky streams of Chaos bumping on
Aimlessly down into oblivion.

ADIEU TO HITLER

What can the pen accomplish in these hours?
Should it be idle with all useless things,
While ink dries up in daily narrowing rings?
Or can it summon immaterial powers
To aid us, as with wands to olden towers
Wizards are said to have called shapes with
wings?
For surely we have need of heartenings
From all that come to wand or pen of ours.
And yet the English spirit is decreed
Only to reach the heights to which it rises,
When wakened by disasters and surprises:
These are its sustenance and only need.
And when they press it most, our history shows
That soon some tyrant into exile goes.

SLEEP

How good it is to be much more than man,
To rule a nation at one's will, and plan
The destinies of Europe, to descry
Which men should live and which had better die,
How good to be to men what Odin was,
In grand old tales, and even more, because
No thunders ever were in Heaven heard
So loud as those that at the Fuehrer's word
Roll from his guns in disobedient lands.
How good to utter unrestrained commands,
To say which neutrals may continue free,
And which must be the slaves of Germany;
To have a house upon the mountain side,
And look magnificently far and wide
At Austria, like an eagle on the steep,
And to have everything desired but sleep.

TO ITALY

Old friend whom Browning loved and Byron too,
Only your Dante if alive could tell
What recompense were just for what you do,
Immortal Italy, and in which Hell
Your deed will have its punishment. Farewell.

THE ALLY

I saw a gaunt shape walking in the snow
When winter came. He lifted up his hand
And said in accents of a king's command,
Heil Hitler! Thousands round him bent them low,
And did not rise again. Some uttered slow
The same words, then were silent. Through that
land
I saw him stride, and his tall figure stand
Gazing upon Berlin spread out below.
Then in the streets the voices died away
That called on Hitler, and deep stillness came
And in the stillness, like a little flame,
A new voice rose and gathered strength to say,
Feeble at first, then fierce and still more wild,
Heil Famine. And the gazing monster smiled.

TESTS

This struggle, not the first, is not the last.

Hitler and Attila are only tests.

If we are sound our constitution rests

Unshaken. Only those whose time is past,

Like dead oaks waiting for the autumn's blast,

Ever obey a conqueror's behests.

All down the seas the strong waves' whitening
crests

Seek the small crevice rotten in the mast.

We are not destined for disaster yet.

With all his engines Hitler waits in vain

To bring the long, dark ages back again,

Which only come to peoples who forget

Just causes, such as those to which we turn

And such as Germany may never learn.

RIDING TO EL DORADO

El Dorado and its glories,
 El Dorado bright with gold,
Fades with unremembered stories
 Of the Spanish knights of old.

Yet in air when birds are homing,
 When the sun is on the hill,
At the boundaries of the gloaming
 El Dorado glisters still.

Glisters still where stormy weather
 Rims the cloud with rosy foam,
While two knights, that ride together
 Westwards, guide their Spitfires home.

TO MY GATE, ON GOING OUT INTO
THE WORLD

Go, my old gate, which long ago
A lorry smashed in careless glee;
My battered bars of iron, go
And help to win us victory.

No more are you to-day than scrap,
But when transformed to steel you ride
The upper air, you will, mayhap
Undreamed-of destinies decide.

So up, my gate, and then descend
And find the Hun and teach him well
What he is sure to comprehend—
The lesson of the bursting shell.

WORLD DOMINION LOST

Aid me, my muse, and tell me by what way,
 What winding road or airy esplanade
 The lies of Bremen climb to the inane.

When first the world was made, an ambient layer
 About its atmosphere, long after named
 Heavyside, was circuitously built.
 Thither the lies of Bremen, hurled aloft
 By force electrical from engines dire,
 Ascend, in empty ether to consort
 With vapid spirits and with ghosts not damned—
 Being too vacant for damnation yet—
 Bogies and bogles, leprechauns and ghouls,
 And all relations of that people called
 Flibbertigibbets. Thence to earth again,
 Refracted downwards from their brief consort
 With disembodied phantoms, they pervert
 The ears of those that unto Bremen turn,
 As once in Canaan turned to Baalim
 The ill-advised; whereof great harm was done.
 Two hundred thousand times they run a mile
 Within one second, thus outpacing far
 The hippogriff and all created things.
 And, being heard, they pass remoter yet

To vex the furthest boundaries of the sky,
There to provoke the gentle asteroids
Or taint sweet streams with their abundant hate
On Venus, Saturn, Mercury or Mars;
For these are lies that have the taste of slime.

Thank you, my muse, you've made it very clear.

AFTER A WHILE

There was a man who for his people's good
Taught them to thrust all other tribes aside.
And he had empire barbarous and wide,
And frowning on far lands his towers stood.

His men were dreaded most, of all earth's brood,
Men that no more for freedom even sighed,
But gladly sacrificed it to his pride,
And stood at arms to slaughter whom he would.

Who was he? That is more than I can tell.
There is a rumour hinting of his reign
And of the splendour of his citadel,
Into whose streets the stillness came again.

They say that still his proclamations stand
Graved upon brass and under miles of sand.

SONG AFTER DOORN

Well, well, you've come! You'll find the work here
light;

No ceremonial; we live simply here;
A cup of cocoa in my room at night
And, very rarely, a small glass of beer.

I shall expect you always to be neat,
And keep things tidy. Breakfast is at nine.
We lunch at one, at half-past twelve you eat.
Then you bring tea at five. At eight we dine.

My royal sons may sometimes come to call:
You merely lay an extra place, or more.
I'm sure they will not trouble you at all.
And, by the way, why DID you make that war?

THE BLACK SHEEP OF GREYSTONES

You say, oh voice from Bremen town,
That Greystones was your home,
Where all the Wicklow hills look down
Upon the channel's foam.

That is a pleasant land to know
And, though so far away,
You doubtless see the curlews go,
In dreams, across to Bray;

You doubtless see the heather still,
That grew when days were warm
In bygone summers, and each hill
Magnificent in storm.

But when you come again amid
Those Wicklow hills and sea,
Throw down your pay as Judas did
And find yourself a tree.



BETTING ON A CERTAINTY

Sometimes at rouge-et-noir a run
Of black will go to twenty-one—
Or even more, for all I know.
Hitler seemed mad a while ago
In Poland, and I told him so.
I said that Warsaw would hold out,
But he won there without a doubt.
I said he'd never win the fight
In Norway, but he turned out right.
I said that Holland humbled Spain
And soon would show its might again.
I said that Belgium stopped the Kaiser
And once again would hold the Yser,
But Adolf Hitler turned out wiser.
I said he never would advance
Against the French. He conquered France.
At us his next ambition climbs.
He has been right so many times,
That I will wager all I've got,
And borrow more and stake the lot,
And recommend my neighbours too
To do the same as I shall do
And back their faith that before long
Hitler will turn out to be wrong.

INFORMATION TO THE ENEMY

Where have they set their greedy eyes?
Upon our downs that roll along
Through Kent and Sussex, till the song
Of ocean greets them and there flies
The seagull now in their blue skies
Instead of larks? Do they devise
Plans against these, our enemies?
Or level lands by broad and fen
And pastures of the Ouse and Nen:
Is it to these they would do wrong?
Or moorlands of the Yorkshiresmen,
Uplifted upon headlands strong?
Or, further North, on burn and ben
Would they conjure calamities
And shell the cots in every glen?
If to the downlands, they will find
The hard chalk, made of myriad bones
Of things the ages left behind
In long-dry seas, and flinty stones;
And sometimes, on the hill-tops, zones
Of rich red clay in hazel's shade,
And gold sands easy for the spade,
Where all through June the stock-dove
moans.

Or, if the fenland they invade,
There they will have soil dark and deep,
Carried by rivers in their sleep
And, in a thousand ages, laid
Near to the tides' eternal sweep.
But the great moorlands, they are made
Of softest earth, from heath decayed
In everlasting years, and sand
Gritty and white, as though a hand
Had thrown a little here and there.
There is good rest in that bright air
And sleep as sound as anywhere.
Granite and moss in Scotland lie
Where the blue harebells cheer July
And the grey storms go striding by.
And there, although they will not hear,
About the turning of the year
The great stags roar amongst the mist
Descending from the mountains grey
When the hills turn to amethyst,
And through the gloaming stream away
The splendours of the end of day.
Aye, there's the place to rest away!
But come wherever you may list,
Our enemies, and you shall have
A welcome to our British clay
And nowhere find a better grave.

IN THANKSGIVING

From jealousy's malicious schemes,
When Death was swift upon the wing
And the high air was torn with screams;
From cold deliberate slaughtering,
For ends outlasting Hitler's dreams
God saved the King.

BAD NEWS . . .

Bad news in this war we alone shall know,
We only, for the German rulers dare
Tell nothing that their people could not bear,
Until the truth breaks in and Nazis go,
With all their Black Guards and their Gestapo
Like nightmares blown by the bright morning air,
And freedom shall come home again, more fair
For exile, to her haunts of long ago.
And Prague shall welcome her with all its flags
And Danzig shall receive her yet again,
Her trumpets shall be blown from Norway's crags,
Poland shall live and Austria break the chain;
And England shall have peace again, until
Europe grows dark with the next tyrant's will.

Now Foch, and Joffre, and Clemenceau are dead
Let us rejoice in it, well pleased that they,
Safe buried in the earth where they were bred
Escape, as they deserve, this fatal day.

ON A BROADCAST FROM BREMEN

Sad voices calling through the night,
Captives from Blenheims burned or broken.
So, to the Philistine's delight,
Samson in Gaza might have spoken.

SPRING

Now spring has revelled over weald and wold,
And kingcups have appeared in all their pride.
The buttercups are like a golden tide,
Where stoops the dandelion, now grown old,
His head turned hoary amid so much gold.
An oak-tree, golden too, stands straight beside
A dark-green chestnut, newly beautified
With the tall blossoms that its branches hold.
And up and down the trunks the squirrel runs
And swallows have come home from far away
And singing birds are happy everywhere,
While, hugely filling the far, lucid air,
Hinting Man's sorrow in a troubled day,
Mumbles the sound of very distant guns.

THE OLD MAN

Pale in the face and feeble I saw him go,
With a worn moustache on his lip, as he passed me
slow,

An old man wearily pacing a London street,
Depending much on his stick; with uncertain feet
He made each step, where all things hurried but he,
New things troubling his eye and strange to his
memory.

And this he thought to himself as he went his way,
Lonely, one of a band of another day:

When those niggers charged and came on, spear
upon spear,

I never thought that I should be walking here,
Not in this year.

THE CHANGELING

If fairies, jealous of King Albert's fame
Once, in the cradle, changed his eldest son,
Surely in Elfland with a fairy name
There fights some hero till his war is won.

VICTORY

Black with thunder grows the night:
Now I sing of dawn and light.
Lost are battles, crushed the free:
Let us look to Victory;
Victory that like a star,
Very faint and very far,
Yet will shine to show the way
And will not fade until the day.

A VICTORY

The war in the air is yet to be,
And the war on land and the war at sea,
 But the war in the ether's won.
For we listen to Bremen whenever we choose,
But if one of the enemy hears *our* news
 It's death for the poor old Hun.

A WORD IN SEASON

Since Angle, Jute and Saxon became one
With Norman, never have we lost a war,
Even though England bears full many a scar
Of old disasters and we oft have known
Defeat, as when there struggled for the throne
The white rose and the red, or an ill star
Shone on King Charles and Cromwell, or afar
Cornwallis and his men were overthrown.
But always, when we came upon defeat,
English with English fought. No foreign power
Has ever yet laid England at its feet.
And those that wait and watch us at this hour,
Like wolves about a camp, do well to wait,
For to fight England is like fighting Fate.

BEFORE WARSAW FELL

Now on a narrow islet Freedom stands,
Struggling in Warsaw among mounds of slain.
Eastward she looks three thousand miles in
vain,
And northward nothing sees but armed bands
Right to the Baltic. And the wasted lands
Draw closer in, till all the Polish plain,
But this, sees triumph of the tyrant's reign
And men acclaiming it with lifted hands.

And looking back on happy things desired,
On flowers and music, and remembering peace,
Freedom has but one hope, one guiding star,
Which will burn on when tyranny is tired
And at the tyrant's bidding will not cease.
And that one guide, that only hope, is war.

THE LESSON

In 1914 England opened school
To teach the Kaiser. Now it's Hitler's turn
For the hard learning of the simple rule,
Which he must study while the nations mourn
That this aggression only leads to Doorn.

THE DARKEST HOUR

Now are we at the very darkest hour,
And in the darkness we are all alone,
The last of all our allies, lying prone.
But now we know no blacker cloud can lour,
And now remembering our ancient power
We wait whatever may be sailed or flown,
With all our kith but one, like ramps of stone
Leaning against an age-enduring tower.
And in that tower, like a frightened maid,
Liberty shelters, and at times she sings
Old songs of freedom learned in many lands.
She is immortal, and our tower stands
From times as dark as these, when dreadful things
Died at its gates. She need not be afraid.

THE HEIRLOOM

These are the days that, to their utmost hour,
The upper and the nether millstones grind.
And ground with them are beast and human-
kind
And wood and hill and farm and field and flower.
And what is ground to-day shall be the dower
Of future generations which shall find
The worth of something sifted and refined
From this our riot of material power.
It may be something very plain, and old,
A simple thing we have forgotten long,
Something that might be told of in a song,
But which for a long while has not been told.
But be it what it may, it will tell plain,
Long after us, that Hitler lived in vain.

PÉTAÏN

They say that Marlborough, with his memory lost,
Saw, in his illness and decrepitude,
Some portrait of himself in happier mood,
Painted in days when not a warrior crost
A sword with his and won, and when no frost
Of age had touched his hair; and there he stood
An old man wondering at young lustihood
And asking what man's face was there engrossed.
So, surely, France's famous soldier-son
Forgets his own heroic deeds to-day.
Oh, will not someone go to him and say:
'You are Pétain.' Then memories of Verdun,
Marne and Carençy must irradiate
His mind with their old glories; though too late!

TO THE INVADER OF HOLLAND

Lost! And your act, as you have rightly said,
Must affect Germans for a thousand years.
Lost! Lost for certain! And not all your tears,
Whether in anger or repentance shed,
Can cleanse the German name. May none be bred
Long hence, to heed again what Prussia swears,
Or to believe her treaties, till appears
The time you fixed and all those years are sped.
Till then the fool that trusts the Prussian word
Will die like helpless things that poachers slay,
Or live in sorrow like the caged bird.
Who trusts this word, before that distant day,
Will trust the wounded buffalo or make
Treaties with Africa's most deadly snake.

OVER THE FRAGMENTS

Hitler, you had the curious luck to hold
Germany's civilization in your hand,
If not all Europe's, like a vase of old.
Made by rare craftsmen in an ancient land.
That was an honour of enormous worth,
To be remembered till your pulses stop,
Shared by few men that ever dwelt on earth.
But what a pity that you let it drop!

IN DARK DAYS

A thousand years have nurtured Liberty
On English soil, and Mercy, only seen
Amongst the strong; here Justice grew serene,
Liberty's sister whom we thought to see
Dwelling amongst us everlastingly.

Now on the battles being fought between
The Somme and sea, depends if, like a queen
Whose cause is lost, each shall to exile flee.
And where if not in England shall they dwell?
Or with what people if not British? Where
Shall they spend lonely years till they come
home?

Will they go back to fields of asphodel,
Or drift as ghosts along the moonlit air,
Or haunt the place where Hitler murdered
Roehm?

AN IMPERIAL SONNET

God punish all my enemies; and first
Of all the English, for they cheated me
Of glory; then the French, who would not be
Defeated as I planned; and, nearly worst,
The Belgians, but for whom I would have burst
Unheralded on France, triumphantly
Driving the British army to the sea.
Also I would have Italy accurst.
But when these things have been attended to,
And dooms apportioned where they are
deserved,
Punish, oh Heaven, Adolf Hitler too,
That Austrian who as a corporal served.
For where God put me, in that very place,
He gives his orders. How has he the face?

INVICTA

‘Vanguard of Liberty, ye men of Kent.’

Wrote Wordsworth once, and now again they rise,
The farmers of that land that nearest lies
To Germany’s tremendous armament.
How Wordsworth would have smiled encourage-
ment!

And Kipling, too, although the rivalries
Of Sussex would have honour in his eyes.
They left their faith to England when they went.
And England standing angrily at bay,
As in the days of peril that they knew,
Hears them like trumpets call to her to-day.

And Shakespeare, Milton, Scott and Byron, too.
And little hope has Hitler, if he hears,
From those free voices ringing down the years.

OUTCAST

Though Liberty has fallen on mischance,
Must France forget her whom she loved of old?
If with glazed eyes they dully see her sold,
Who sit in Vichy in that death-like trance
And no more recognise her countenance,
Must none defend her on the slopes of gold,
Or even in exile, lest the tyrant scold?
Can such things be in the fair land of France?
Feeble, in flight and fettered, though she be,
She has known exile and such days before.
Always she turns, and as she turns men see
No pitiable weeping any more,
But eyes alight with glow of massacre.
Then those that face the tiger face not her.

IN ANXIOUS DAYS

Now at this hour may all who trust in right,
All who believe that truth can conquer lies,
Let their hopes soar, till ancient verities
That lit the ages come again in sight,
Making them like dull clouds all tipped with light,
Gliding the pinnacles of centuries.

These hopes shall see with their far-gazing eyes
Truths but for which the world were lost in night.
With the torn scraps of treaties flung away,

Such truths shall fade not: right is mighty yet,
And, though assailed by Hitler's whole array,

It will not let the world be lost, nor let
Liberty perish. None knows this so well
As the great tyrants in the vaults of Hell.

NEUTRALITY

In the loud and lovely noon
Of rose-decorated June,
Listening to the blackbird's song
While the world is going wrong.
Not a single sound I hear
Hints that Death is coming near,
Drawing in from far and wide
On the Irish countryside,
With people by its peaceful streams
Dreaming still their fathers' dreams,
And thinking that the words they say
Will keep Destiny away.

THE OLD ROAD

When at the head of his immense array
Napoleon entered Moscow, and his might
Seemed to have risen to its utmost height,
Elba was only eighteen months away.
And he had genius, and his hand held sway
From sunny Paris to the Arctic night.
Surely for him there was not then in sight
The downward slope of the world-conquerors'
way.

It's the same road, whoever travels it.
Faster and faster must that traveller run
As the road slants more steeply to the pit.
And Alexander clutching Babylon,
Or Caesar trying to dictate to Rome,
Or raging Hitler, go the same way home.

THE MARSEILLAISE

Last night, wild on the air
I heard the fine, fierce blare
 Of the Marseillaise arising.
Over the night from far
It came as a sudden star
 Gleams bright and surprising.
It lifted its voice as it told
Of France's splendour of old,
 And her great glory
Brought to our ears again.
Did you hear it, Marshal Pétain?
 Did you hear her story?

THE L.D.V.

It's hard to die by foreign streams:
England's so far from sight
That men can only see in dreams
The land for which they fight.

But lucky are the L.D.V.,
Who in the fields they know
Are helping to keep England free
Where their own gardens grow,

With the familiar trees above,
And in these happy times
Miss nothing of the land they love
Except our olden chimes.

THE SONG OF AN L.D.V.

Dull instruments we use to slay,
Compared with those of old,
And not a weapon of to-day
Is lovely to behold.

But since it was King Arthur's aim
To keep his Britain free,
And feelings pretty much the same
Inspire the L.D.V.

Although of armour we have none,
Nor shield nor sword nor spur,
I've given my old sporting gun
The name Excalibur.

SONGS OF AN L.D.V.

(No. 2)

If ever for the L.D.V.,
 A badge they should intend,
Give us no star or blazonry
Of crown or crest, but let it be
 Rather some simple blend
Of traveller's joy and bryony,
Or such wild blooms as feel the bee
 On hills that we defend.
Allegiance to the Crown our corps
 Have all learned long ago,
But never have we fought before,
 As we are soon to do,
For England's King on his own land,
Where hills of chalk watch wealds of sand
 And hear the thrush's trills.
Give us for badge what some child's hand
 Might gather on those hills.

A SUNDAY MORNING

There is a village little known,
Hidden and sheltered in a fold
Of the North downs, whose church of stone
And ruddy brick and oak was old
When the Armada came; and there,
When harebells, thyme and borage were
Showing their beauty to the wold
I heard the organ's roaring breath
Blend with the passing bomber's drone
And musically hint of death.

THE REAPING

Now is the harvest ripe in Kent,
And farmers all the way
Across the weald's and wold's extent
Are out by night and day.

They pace the downs while others sleep
And when the blackbird trills.
But what is it they wait to reap
With rifles on the hills?

A SONG OF AN L.D.V.

If with parachute and gun
The Nazis come and I get one,
Richer for his blood will blow
Kentish flowers which we know
On some sunny slope whereby
We encounter, he and I;
Or stronger some dog-daisy grow
Underneath a summer sky.
Or, when the hills of chalk are dry,
And golden are the stalks of grass,
Some patch of thyme with deeper glow
May cheer whomever chance to pass,
Or tempt and feed the wandering bee
With that blood from oversea;
Or brighter shall a borage shine
Or sweeter smell some eglantine.
And just the same if he gets me.

‘THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE’

The soldier of old was trained
To halt and advance and retire
For years before he attained
To steadiness under fire.

Under fire every day
We of the Home Guard show
Rather an odd display
When to air drills we go.

Joints that are slow to bend
Make us a sight on parade,
And we seem to begin at the end,
Where the old soldier was made.

A BIRD AT PEACE

I saw a blackbird on a lawn,
That ran a little way and flew
Into a bush to sleep till dawn,
As long ago they used to do

In evenings of the days gone by;
And it seems strange that as of old
And under the same peaceful sky,
Now putting on its veils of gold,

This bird should do as birds did then
When no one wondered at their homing
And not a menace threatened men
With any danger from the gloaming.

COMRADES

If spirit of a mole or ant
 Below the field of Waterloo
Can ever to our days transplant,
 Then, spirit, I would speak with you:

Under that field, as I in Kent,
 While Europe's history was made,
Obscure and unperceived you went
 Beneath the shaking cannonade.

We have not very much to say
 When men tell tales of chivalry,
You in your little mound of clay,
 I serving with the L.D.V.

But in your field, and in our sky
 Where sudden little clouds are curled,
Have we not witnessed, you and I,
 Decisive battles of the world?

WHILE GOERING RAGES

All the old things remain,
Wind in the wood brawling,
Glitter of Charles's Wain,
Foxes to vixens calling.
There shall be nights again
With not a bomb falling.

COMPANY

Lonely, lonely is the rowing
Of the journey over Styx,
Lone the wharf when few are going,
Where the listless water licks
Silent shores whereon are sleeping
Shadows that no movement make,
And that even in sleep are weeping.
Yearning for a world awake
Went the few from that dim landing
Sadly and without their mates.
Now in ranks men march upstanding,
Resolute, where Charon waits.

ALL CLEAR

Some honour we must pay a fallen foe.

What shall it be, when Hitler dies next year?
Not the Last Post, that for our own we blow,
But let us sound for the last time All Clear.

STARLIGHT IN KENT

A clear September night,
Pigs under oak-trees rooting,
Flocks bleating out of sight,
Owl after owl hooting,
Searchlights to left and right,
Bombs falling and guns shooting.

THE GUNS OF LONDON

In valleys that I may not name,
By London's edge, where once for plunder
Of early flowers children came
When bluebells made the woods a wonder
And hazel leaves were like a flame
And celandines were growing under,
Now lines of anti-aircraft lie;
And when a raid is rumbling by
I hear them dancing in the sky
Like Oriental gods of thunder.
Good luck to them! For they will bring
Back to our land, I know not when,
Once more a calm and natural Spring.
With quiet once again and wren
And blackbirds will be carolling
Where guns are now and armed men;
And bands of children gathering
The woodland flowers will be told
Of a bad man whose spite of old
Wished ill to every peaceful thing
And decent thing of weald and wold,
And what became of him and why,
And how they should be warned thereby.

THE VICTORS

Through heavy clouds serenely still
The sun was dipping to the gloaming,
Over a Southern English hill,
And there two aeroplanes were homing.

Although romance has lost its mail
And all the quests of ancient story,
To-day can tell its splendid tale,
To-day can equal Arthur's glory.

Into the calm of eventide,
After a day of Hun's bravado,
I saw two knights together ride
Along a vale of El Dorado.

MONSIEUR DE PARIS

I looked into the future, and not far,
And saw all Paris in a single street,
Or so it seemed, and heard a myriad feet
Shuffle in expectation, and the jar
Of eager voices; then a curious car
Appeared, and the one man was on a seat,
For whom they waited in the dust and heat.
'Pétain!' the cry goes up, and rolls afar.
But who is this all Paris seems to know,
To whom the marshal comes? The early sun
Shines on his face as the wild voices grow,
And on him are the eyes of everyone.
Who is he, all dressed up in suit of black
And black kid gloves, to welcome Pétain back?

'IF WE MAKE PEACE'

Where, if we lost would Magna Carta be,
Or anything that we have ever won
For freedom, or what profit from deeds done
In old days for this land of Liberty?
Who in all England would be longer free,
If we should make a treaty with the hun
Before his day is ended and the sun
Sets on the last scene of his butchery?
If we made peace with him before that day,
To end the slaughter, we should end our hope
And in a world that knew no more of it
Our women marketing would have to say,
'Heil Hitler! Have you got a cake of soap?'
'Heil Hit!' They would say, 'We're out of it.'

AN INDUSTRIOUS SLAVE

A man enslaved was in a dungeon bound
To the rock floor by an enormous chain,
And after weary years the victim found
Deep rust had nearly cut one link in twain.

So, when at dawn his gaoler brought him bread
And a small jug of water for that day,
The slave implored him that he bring instead
Lamp, solder and the rest of the array

That tinkers use. And these the gaolers brought.
So the slave laboured all the day and night
To mend the chain, until his work had wrought
A link as firm as once when new and bright.

Why he did so, I do not understand;
Yet there are those who know, but do not tell,
Keeping the knowledge to a little band
Of secret people that in Vichy dwell.

FULL MOON, JUNE, 1940

With what serene full gaze the rising moon
Looks towards earth, which, troubled with
man's thunder,
Can feel her firmest headlands falling asunder
And all among the roses of mid-June,
The cuckoo's calling and the blackbird's tune,
Sees her old cities given up to plunder,
And to the future looks with fearful wonder
And knows not if the end is coming soon.
And earth in two weeks' time as calm will seem
To any lunar eye: for ought we know
Some Hitler there brought ruin long ago,
Or in that golden calm, so like a dream,
Creatures like Nazis still are tyrannous
And all the lunar peoples envy us.

THE MARAUDERS

What man with any human sympathies
And tears to shed would not now weep for
France,
Over whose fields her plunderers advance;
Her farms, her vineyards and her sanctuaries,
Her ancient cities and her poplar trees,
All fallen now on the same evil chance,
While through her gardens the great engines
prance,
Which churn the dead and on the wounded seize.
Blame not the Germans. That insensate horde,
Savagely brutal, neither knows nor feels
What ancient treasure lies under its heels,
When dully ravaging at Hitler's word
It lets loose war for the mere sake of strife,
As it has done three times in one man's life.

ODE TO BREMEN

What will you do when Hitler's gone,
 Hee-haw of Bremen,
When Adolf leaves you lying alone
At an unconnected microphone
 Bremen my boy?

How will the little jackal be fat,
 Bremen my liar,
When the lion's dead and his hide's a mat?
And a nasty, mangy lion at that,
 Bremen my boy.

Alone with his fleas on every limb,
 Haw-haw of Bremen,
He cares no more for them than the whim
Of the lion ever bothered with him,
 My poor lying boy.

You'll have to find another dictator,
 Bremen my liar,
Or take your mike and be the narrator
Of an ill-famed house down near the equator.
From some such place we'll hear of you later,
 Bremen my boy.

HEIL AND FAREWELL

You've sunk a battleship in Scapa Flow,
You've sown a good few mines along the seas,
You've made more speeches than we'll ever know
And these have been received with ecstasies.
Add to your triumphs and your victories
That many thousand Polish widows mourn
And then reflect at evening at your ease
That every day you're one day nearer Doorn.

You may do many things before you go
And one or two more countries yet may seize;
You may attack the forts of Maginot
To leave your men on the chevaux-de-frise;
You may loose gas upon the eastern breeze;
But sure and certain to your destined bourn
You still move onward, though by slow degrees,
And every day you're one day nearer Doorn.

If you go soon, there's hope; if you go slow
Europe may be a land of shattered trees
And shell-ploughed fields where only thistles grow.
But, soon or late, who scans the future sees
Far off, though clear, a furtive shape that flees
Westward towards the dykes, not to return.

The Kaiser wants a man to hand round cheese.
And every day you're one day nearer Doorn.

Fuehrer, you've had a really splendid show.

Soon Liberty and England take their turn,
And France and Poland. We're not long your foe,
For every day you're one day nearer Doorn.

AN EXPRESSION OF THANKS

Where sunlight rests on water, the parade
Of gnats is dancing in the calm of June;
A trout leaps, and the ripples flash and fade;
A hidden thrush repeats his magic tune;

And suddenly his only rival trills
The blackbird's song from the last bunch of
may;
Laburnum petals, fallen in the hills,
Drift with their little golden sails away;

In the enchanted mirror of the stream
Gray trunks go downward into green and gold,
Dreaming in dimness an unchanging dream,
Till wind-blown ripples through their dream
are rolled;

The light of a late kingcup glitters clear;
A murmur comes from where far water falls;
The sharp wings of a darting swallow veer;
A cornerake from the upland calls and calls.

And nothing sleeps in green luxuriance,
And nothing flashes petals or spreads wings,
That is not being fought for now in France
By soldiers guarding quiet and decent things.

GOLD IN THE AIR

Now is gold gathered from the very air
And every poet's hand is free to plunder
The gleaming edges of the clouds of thunder.
Now each day's news is of a stuff as rare
As tales that in Ionian islands were
By Homer heard. Our age is falling asunder;
Yet there will be distilled for the world's wonder
From our lost cities something still more fair.
For History looking at our days will see
Above the flame and ruin of our towns
Arising like the larks from English downs,
Outsoaring Time, the spirits of the free,
Whose wings will flash a brightness in the gloom
Frowning from Germany's tremendous doom.

THE ENGLISH SPIRIT

Had any sought some while ago
The very spirit of this land,
With feelings that could understand
And eyes that could perceive and know,

He might have found one evening
By a wood's edge, or in the dawn
Asleep upon a rectory lawn,
The English spirit with drooped wing.

Or where old hollyhocks stood tall
Outside a cottage might have been
That ancient spirit partly seen,
Part hid by roses, from the wall.

Leaning upon mild winds that were
Made mellower by distant chimes,
That used to wander in those times
And meet with others up in air.

Or else where willows stand by streams
In valleys that are far from towns,
Or upon thyme across the downs
Walking along the edge of dreams,

Or in mid-summer on the wold
Of Gloucestershire at noon, where sheep
Ring bells, and all seems half asleep
And all immeasurably old.

Or on a village cricket-ground
Not long after the teams had gone
And still a glint of twilight shone;
Indeed wherever peace was found.

But now through smoke of sudden fights
The English spirit rides the sky
Or flashes from an English eye
Looking along a rifle's sights;

Now that great spirit guards our coast,
Or walks with men that watch the hills,
And rises when the siren shrills,
And hears the two dictators boast,

And smiles, foreseeing what will be,
And waits in this old land of fame,
Fiercer and calmer than a flame,
For what will come from Germany.

LEARNING

Little creatures of the hay
Rabbits, mice and voles and all
That are food to birds of prey,
Undefended things and small.

We have never had before
Tidings of the thrill or dread
Of the paths that you explore
With the kestrel overhead.

Never known with what delight
You secure your grains of food,
Gaining even air and light
Only by your fortitude.

Now when death is in the air,
Rumbling over, screaming past,
We superior folk may share
Something of your lives at last.

ARMISTICE DAY IN LONDON

An autumn sun is on the mist
And Westminster is turning gold
Where many thousands keep their tryst
With those who never will be old.

Some fog-horns upon distant ships
Mutter. A gun fires. A bird's wing
Shines in the air, then silence grips
The land and all that gathering.

And looking on them down Whitehall
Nelson against clear miles of blue
Can greet, if spirits greet at all,
The same old England that he knew.

A DREAM OF THE CITIES

On a night without a star
Through a dream I saw go by
Shapes that gathered from afar
Anxiously and hurriedly.
And a wind was in the sky,
And with the wind there seemed to fly
All the wandering birds that are,
All the birds that far away
To another continent
Fly upon an autumn day;
And no one sees them on their way.
They were wailing as they went,
And lower down on rock and grass,
But towering above the hills,
I saw the dim gray figures pass
Like a rising mist that fills
All a valley wet with rills
Which a winter's evening chills,
And they wore for ornament
Shades of tower and battlement
Like huge crowns on every head,
Queens they were, but live or dead
Or immortal, who can tell?
Suddenly one spoke. She said
'There lies Paris.' Far ahead

She pointed. France's citadel
Lay many hundred miles from there;
But they went onward through the air;
As though its walls were visible
Or as though they were aware
Of no darkness anywhere.
Wreaths they carried in their hands
Plucked from forests of far lands.
Who were they and wherefore went
Crowned with tower and battlement
To Paris in this fatal June,
Over hills and seas and sands
As though urged on by fierce commands
That bade them come to Paris soon
And lit by neither sun nor moon?
Were they queens of cities lost
In the ages long ago?
Was each one a city's ghost?
Were they dead who hurried so,
And—dreadful fancy!—did they go,
To gather to their mournful host,
After sudden funeral,
Paris, proud, imperial,
And loveliest city of them all?
No, they were immortal things,
Queens of cities of to-day
Come with hope and heartenings
For Paris in her arduous day
While her valiant army flings



Back the foe and hurls away
All the batteries he brings,
Over Marne and over Aisne
And back again to Germany.



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War poems

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